**CHALK TALK: HOW TO HAVE A SILENT DISCUSSION ON AN IMPORTANT ISSUE**

**Overview:** A chalk talk is a simple procedure to promote staff discussion and awareness of issues and perspectives- silently. The technique is particularly useful for examining school culture issues and for articulating a vision of what some aspect of schooling should look and feel like. The Chalk Talk is also an excellent way to promote staff awareness of patterns and problems, and to insure that all voices on staff are heard. For example, one elementary school staff was shocked to observe a pronounced current of negativity about their school. The evidence from the Chalk Talk was irrefutable and led to staff ownership of the problem.

1. **Formulate a good, open-ended question that will provoke comments and responses concerning an issue important to the school.** For example, Chalk Talks have been used to examine behavioral expectations, student discipline, rituals, and expectations about how teaching and learning occurs throughout the school. One example of a Chalk Talk question is: “What is your vision for a good school culture, and what is getting in the way?”
2. **Provide plenty of chart paper and markers and arrange a good space for participants to write and respond.** Write the questions or topic in the middle of the paper in bold marker.
3. **Explain the Chalk Talk procedure and answer any participant questions.**
4. **Set up Norms for the Chalk Talk:** This technique only works if everyone is writing and responding throughout the designated time period. Make it clear that everyone is responsible for writing, reading other people’s comments, and responding; there should be no talking; and no one should sit down until the time period is over. Opinions must be freely expressed and honored, and no personal attacks are allowed.
5. **Allow 20 minutes for the Chalk Talk.** As facilitator, it’s helpful to walk around and read, and gently point participants to interesting comments. All writing and responding is done in ABSOLUTE SILENCE.
6. **Search for patterns.** In pairs, participants should read through all the postings and search for patterns and themes (or “notice and wander”). This part takes about five minutes.
7. **Whole Group Share:** The pairs should report our patterns and themes, round-robin style, until all perceptions are shared.
8. **Action Plan:** What concrete steps might the staff be able to take now that issues and themes have been identified?
9. **Group Debrief:** What was the experience like of “talking silently”? How could this technique be used in a classroom?